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## **Tools exist to help healthcare staff dealing with threatening patients**



**Amy van der Loo**

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GPs report added stress and despair due to misdirected anger from patients [Image: paseven on iStock]

Knowing your rights when faced with threatening behaviour from patients is crucial says Wellington barrister Gaeline Phipps.

Harassment and threatening behaviour towards healthcare staff have increased dramatically in recent years, but unlike supermarkets, which can opt for a zero-tolerance approach to protect the safety and wellbeing of staff, practices have a finer line to negotiate.

In her Medicolegal column in *New Zealand Doctor Rata Aotearoa* (8 May), Ms Phipps writes, “first and foremost, you have an obligation to assist in an emergency. However, you also have the right to be safe at work and in your homes.”

She provides some tools for dealing with threatening situations, such as a patient who is verbally abusive towards staff. Other examples are a patient who won't leave the waiting room or one who waits outside the clinic to harangue staff.

**Know your rights**

Ms Phipps explains what you can and can't do regarding disclosing information and ending doctor–patient relationships.

She also describes when and how to issue a trespass notice and what constitutes harassment, such that a restraining order can be applied for.

“In short, there are steps you can take to be protected from threatening behaviour, all of which, I accept, is cold comfort when facing another day of misdirected anger,” Ms Phipps says.

Read the full article here

**“Threatening behaviour from patients, know your rights”**